Transubstantiation Widgets

By Peter David Smith

Years ago, in the 1990s, I worked in an I.T. job in an Internet Café.

The café was called "Internet Express" and was located near Exeter Central Station, in Queen Street, where the Tabac Taphouse and The Exploding Bakery are now in 2025. Next year, who knows?

My job was setting customers up on a computer for an hour or so, either to play games or to surf the "information super highway" or to open an email account. All of these online services were fairly new to most people in the 1990s and I sometimes had to teach a customer even the most basic things like how to use a mouse and click on a link.

During the years of my life I've seen many kinds of technology come into existence. Captain Kirk's communicator device with the flip-open action becoming a realworld design for cell phones in the early 21st Century, for instance. Or the TNG "pads" becoming the design for realworld Apple iPads. What we used to call "running a computer programme" came to be called "using an application" and then was shortened to tapping on "an app".

And then there were "widgets".

The word "widget" had been around for a long time and had usually meant the same as "wotsit", "gadget", "thingamajig", "wossname", "doohickey", or "thing-a-me-bob".

In other words it meant some sort of, usually small, item which was needed for some purpose but which either lacked a name or maybe the proper name of it wasn't important enough to be worth remembering.

Then suddenly it changed again and widgets were the little desktop icons which we would click on to launch an app. Fair enough. No big deal. A rose by any other name. Not worth fussing over whether we say we're "clicking on an app" or "clicking on a widget".

There were various different types of widgets and several different definitions of the word, according to the implementation by the various differing tech companies.

Some things which we now either take for granted or perhaps have completely forgotten about were new and exciting in those days. I remember when several competing tech companies put their differences aside and combined their efforts to create a "Universal Serial Bus" cable which would work on all of the major devices equally. A simple USB cable of course. But it was new and important. Previously the different types of computer were not able to talk to each other. And fixing that problem was like Détente and Glasnost all over again.

However, when I reached the age of 57, in 2010, I ran into the problem of employers not wanting to employ older people because we, allegedly, were unable to understand technology. As a result I suffered the longest period of unemployment I've ever had in my life. For four years, from 2010 to 2014 I was rejected by potential employers again and again and again. I even had to go on a restart and retraining course.

The fact that I had worked in I.T. in the 1990s didn't seem to help. The fact that I had a B.A. (hons) in Fine Art didn't seem to help either. I had to go on that restart course and be talked down to by ageing yuppies.

I argued that the ageist branding of my generation as a bunch of technophobes was absurd because I was the same age as Bill Gates, founder of Microsoft, and that Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak were both also born in the 1950s.

Still.

Nevertheless.

Notwithstanding.

That argument didn't help either.

It was all grist to their mill.

So, one day I was in the "Working Links" open plan office where the restart course was managed and the chap who was supposed to be my advisor was pontificating about people of my age group needing to learn some I.T. skills.

As a turning point of his rhetoric he claimed that I wouldn't know simple basic things such as what did he mean by a "widget".

I replied that I was fully cognizant of the function of widgets.

He laughed derisively and challenged me to tell him what a "widget" was.

I replied that a "widget" was one of those little icons on which we click to launch a programme. He denied this description, claiming that a widget didn't need to launch a programme.

We argued. I maintained that the programme or "app" which was represented on the desktop in the form of an icon or widget needs to be activated in order for the widget to display any useful information of any kind whatsoever. It can either be activated by clicking on it or it can automatically launch during boot. Either way, it needs to be actively running code of some kind.

The argument deteriorated into contradiction. "Yes it is" versus "No it isn't".

The advisor seemed to be of the belief system which thinks a "widget" can run in a sort of magical way without any back-end.

Well, it was an impasse. He wasn't even able to back up his opinion with any logical reasoning. Instead he merely maintained that I needed to go onto a further training course so that I could be told I was wrong by "experts".

It made me think of Trinitarianism and the Church.

Some Christian teachings tell us that God is in Three Persons: Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

Other Christian Churches reject Trinitarianism and insist that God is One and thus Jesus is either the same as God or is merely a man in the service of God.

One or the other, not both.

That was the thought that I had in the context of the widget being either the same as the app that it represents or separate and different.

Is the little thing imbued with the power and majesty of the big thing or is the little thing merely an agent of the big thing?

Is Jesus the same as God? Or is Jesus simply a prophet of God?

Is Jesus the Son of God and the Son of Man? Or is Jesus an agent of God, acting separately?

Then again, some widgets are not even representatives of a greater programme. Sometimes they are simply little bits of entirely independent code. But it's still code.

In any case.

Whatever.

Whatever, whatever.

Etc.

And, then I thought of the Sacrament. I thought of transubstantiation.

In 2,000 years of Christianity there has been an unending argument between the believers in a simple puritan interpretation of the bible and the more mystical believers in transubstantiation.

In the Roman Catholic Church it is necessary to accept the version of Christianity dictated by the Vatican and to understand that any other view is heresy. The official dogma insists that the wine and the wafer, taken during Mass, is transubstantiated into the blood and the flesh of Christ. Not merely a metaphor. The wine and the wafer are LITERALLY CHANGED INTO BLOOD AND FLESH. Thus they contain the spirit of God.

How absurd that the same type of argument should arise again in the context of little computer programmes which sit on the desktop of a smartphone!!!

Mind you, I love absurdity, so I'm not really complaining.

Is the widget we see at the front-end the same as the code at the back-end of it? Or is the widget a mystical magical doodad sitting on the front window of your phone and having nothing whatsoever to do with any actual workings and gubbins and nuts'n'bolts?

We could apply the language of the Trinity. We could speak of The Code, The Widget and the Holy Function, in which case the Function is the bit you want to make use of, regardless of whether it comes by the grace of an app, a code or a wighat, ——— ——— oops, I mean widget.

Of course, the so-called employment advisor wasn't really interested in how things work. As an ageing yuppy he was only interested in using the latest jargon in the way that he perceived it being used by his cronies.

So, are the Father, the Son, the Holy Ghost, the wine, the blood, the wafer and the flesh all the same as each other?

These are all examples of THE SIGN.

And they are all, in a sense, CODE.

The signifier and the signified are divided and yet simultaneously united by THE SIGN.

The SIGN has a hoarding or ordering function, an accumulation of signifiers and signifieds. Compare the Turkic word Ordu or Orda (army or camp) and the historical basis of the language Urdu.

For example the sign of "The Golden Horde" which ruled Central Asia in the 13th and 14th Centuries led by descendants of Genghis Khan. The Golden Horde was divided into the Eastern camp of The Blue Horde and the Western camp of The White Horde. In that time and in that vast place Turk and Mongol were a united force.

The wall brings together yet holds apart. Yet magnetism always needs its opposite.

North points to South, South points to North. Yin points to Yang, Yang points to Yin.

Some of it is Witchcraft. Some of it is Alchemy.

In "The Hint of an Explanation" by Graham Greene there is a moment, one of those special moments in a story, or in a lifetime, when the boy realises that Blacker takes the idea of the flesh of God so seriously. The boy's understanding of the seriousness of the ritual begins from that moment, and Blacker has made it happen.

The silliest things and the most powerful things both employ the ability to turn lead into gold.

"How much are you worth?" asks the ageing yuppy.

"The same as everyone else" I reply.

"NO" insists the ageing yuppy, "How much are you WORTH?"

"The same as everyone else" I repeat, "All people and all lifeforms are of equal value".
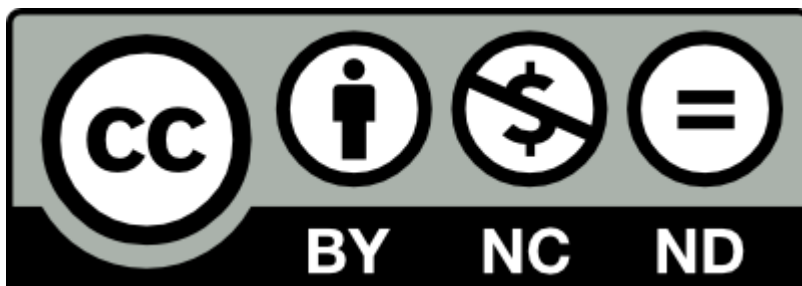
Ageing yuppy: (Snorts derision)

From the triviality of the widget as representative of the app, to the seismic history-shaking SIGN of the God in the Man. The man whose flesh and blood magically transform a simple bit of drink and food.

The transformation of the phenomenal world into a dream of the highest, soul endangering, importance, is the kind of Surrealism which makes life worth living.

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